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OGC 72-1101

31 July 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Protection of National Intelligence
Estimates (NIEs)

1. This memorandum contains a recommendation in paragraph 7 for approval by the Director of Central Intelligence.

2. The problem of the release of NIEs (including SNIEs) has been in the offing since we started in business, but has really not come to issue except in the case of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. Here the Administration decided to comply with the Joint Committee's requests insofar as NIEs pertaining to nuclear developments were concerned, but in some cases deleted information pertaining to other matters. The reasons were based in part on the Joint Committee's statutory charter which directs that "any Government agency shall furnish any information requested by the Joint Committee with respect to the activities or responsibilities of that agency in the field of atomic energy" and in part on its demonstrated capability and willingness to protect classified information. But the main point was that in the atmosphere of the times the Executive Branch did not want to get into a major struggle on executive privilege on this particular issue.

3. It appears that the question may well come up for decision again in the near future. Two aspects are involved-- the first is classification; the second is executive privilege.

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4. As to classification, we have had considerable discussion with David R. Young of The White House, and the basic disagreement has come clear. Mr. Young feels it would be inconsistent with the new Executive Order 11652 on classification to make a blanket determination that all NIEs are exempt from the automatic declassification provisions of the Order. His position is that each NIE would have to be looked at, and unless we can take a valid position that a NIE involved intelligence sources and methods which should be protected, or one of the other bases for exemption, it would have to come under the 10-, 8-, or 6-year automatic declassification rule, the time depending on the original classification of the document. I have argued the position that NIEs by their nature generically involve intelligence sources and methods, foreign relations matters, information furnished by foreign governments, and in some cases other specialized information which justify a general exemption. Mr. Young claims this would defeat the whole purpose of the Executive Order. I understand this is one of the issues you wish to discuss with Ambassador Eisenhower.

5. It may be that our position on classification will not in the end be upheld under the Executive Order, as in certain specific cases it is difficult to determine the basis for exemption. If so, I have long felt and have occasionally mentioned that NIEs may come within the accepted definition of privileged documents. Executive privilege is the constitutional authority of the President to withhold documents or information in his possession, or in the possession of the Executive Branch, from compulsory process of the Legislative or Judicial Branch of the Government. The doctrine derives from the concept that the President is in the best position to judge what would be improper to reveal to the Congress or to the public. In certain cases classification may be a part of Presidential consideration; however, classification is not in itself a basis for refusing to furnish information to a committee of the Congress having jurisdiction of the matter involved. Executive privilege, however, while widely debated as to how and under what circumstances it can be exercised, has been recognized since the founding of our constitutional system. As stated by Mr. Rehnquist on behalf of the Department of Justice

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before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations at its hearings on the Pentagon Papers in June 1971, at page 362, "It includes the confidentiality of conversations with the President, of the process of decisionmaking at a high governmental level, and the necessity of safeguarding frank internal advice within the executive branch." The formal position of the Attorney General is, "There is no power in Congress or the courts to compel the President's discretion or decision, respecting the propriety of surrendering papers, documents, or information deemed by him to be confidential in character, and the same holds true for the heads of departments."¹ In recent administrations, however, including the present one, the President has specifically directed, in writing, that assertion of executive privilege with the Congress would be made only by the President on the advice of the Attorney General.

6. It has been my belief that NIEs by their nature fall precisely into the privileged category as being part of the process of decisionmaking at a high governmental level requiring protection as frank internal advice within the Executive Branch. In 1962 in connection with the congressional investigation of the military cold war education and speech review policies, President Kennedy directed the Secretaries of Defense and State not to disclose to their committees the names of any individuals involved in the speech-making process, explaining that changes in those speeches were made on the responsibility of the Secretaries themselves. President Kennedy said, "It would not be possible for you to maintain an orderly Department and receive the candid advice and loyal respect of your subordinates if they, instead of you and your senior associates, are to be individually answerable to the Congress, as well as to you, for their internal acts and advice." The Chairman of the Subcommittee, Senator Stennis, upheld the claim of privilege. While different congressmen take different views of the scope of

¹ "The Power of the President to Withhold Information From the Congress," Memorandums of the Attorney General, printed for the use of the Committee on the Judiciary, 1958, p. 72.

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executive privilege, some even denying its existence, the courts have consistently held that the President's assertion of executive privilege, particularly in the field of foreign affairs, is clearly within the prerogatives of the President.

7. As a practical matter, I believe we would not have too much difficulty with our own Subcommittees as presently constituted for a claim of privilege in connection with our formal NIEs. The question is whether we could get Presidential backing for such a position. The technical procedure, prescribed in President Nixon's memorandum of March 24, 1969, is to discuss any claim of privilege in the first instance with the Office of Legal Counsel, Department of Justice. I recommend that I do so. If you approve, I would appreciate guidance as to the timing and whether you wish to speak first to the Attorney General or the President.

STAT

LAWRENCE R. HOUSTON
General Counsel

The recommendation in
paragraph 7 is approved

Richard Helms

31 JUL 1972

Director of Central Intelligence

Date

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Remarks: <p>Good paper, all the I believe the first sentence of para 7 is a little confusing - or confused.</p>			
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